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MAGIC, DIVINATION, AND DEMONOLOGY AMONG THE SEMITES.[1]

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MAGIC.

Magic may be defined as the attempt on man's part to have intercourse with spiritual and supernatural beings, and to influence them for his benefit. It has been made to consist especially in the art of compelling spirits or deities to do the will of him who performs the requisite acts or speaks the needful words. In this way it has been distinguished from religion, as in the *Hibbert Lectures* of d'Alviella (pp. 87 *sq.*). This is not, however, strictly correct. All magic is a kind of religion, an appeal to spirits believed to be more powerful and wise than men, and the methods employed to secure what is wished for are no more than appeals to the good will of the beings consulted. Magic is a lower kind of religion in which the ethical element is either subordinated or sacrificed to other and lower elements. But, as a matter of fact, incantations are prayers. Plants and other materials, when burnt to drive away demons or diseases, are sacrifices. In the mythology of the Vedas it is hard, if not impossible, to distinguish between sacrifices and magical acts; in each case something is done to propitiate higher beings. See Alfred Hillebrandt's *Vedische Opfer und Zauber*, 1897, p. 167.

There are two principal opinions as to the relation of magic and religion. Dr. F. B. Jevons[2] and the older authorities hold that magic is a going back, a devolution from the religious stage, just as Professor Max Müller holds fetishism to be a declension from higher religious conceptions. By the great philosopher Hegel, and by most modern anthropologists, such as E. B. Tylor, A. Lang, F. Ratzel, it is maintained that magic is a

[1] Paper read at meeting of Royal Asiatic Society, London, April 4, 1898, Sir Raymond West, K.C.I.E., LL.D., presiding.

[2] *Introduction to the Study of Religion*, London, 1896.

stepping-stone on the way to religion, if not indeed a lower step in its progress. More justly, magic has to do more or less with all stages of religion, and there are none that are wholly free from it. Whenever material means, or mere words as such, or the reciting of such words, are considered to have influence with deity, ethical and spiritual conditions being neglected or ignored, then the domain of religion is encroached upon by magic.

Magic and medicine have a close connection, and it has been reiterated over and over that magic is incipient medical science. Incantations, plants, drugs, amulets have been first of all found to have definite physical effects, and so they have been included amongst magical conditions. The primary motive, however, in their origination was undoubtedly religious; diseases of all sorts are believed by primitive man to be owing to the action of demons or evil spirits; whatever tends to remove the diseases is considered to have the effect of exorcising, or driving away the demons. In a similar way the distinction of clean and unclean meats in the Old Testament and in non-biblical religions was first of all a religious one, having a totemistic origin; yet the character of the foods in relation to nutrition and health has undoubtedly influenced the division.

DIVINATION.

Divination is the art of obtaining information regarding the future by consulting spiritual beings or otherwise. The information sought for is obtained mostly from the observance of certain omens or signs, but by no means always, for the beings consulted sometimes "possessed" the soothsayer, as modern mediums say they are possessed, so that they are made to speak out the mind of the spirit that indwells them. See Dr. Granger's *Worship of the Romans*, p. 174. This last does not differ from the lower forms of biblical prophecy, that connected with the ecstatic state, as distinguished from the prophecies, which in Riehm's happy phrase is "psychologically mediated."[1]

Both Dr. E. B. Tylor[2] and Dr. F. B. Jevons[3] make a distinction between divination due to supernatural agency, and such as is not, but may be called natural. To the primitive man all kinds of divination were due to spiritualistic or supernatural agency;

[1] *Messianic Prophecy.*

[2] *Encyclop. Brit.*, article "Divination."

[3] Clark's *Bible Dictionary*, "Divination."

even those modes which Tylor thinks to be caused by symbolism have this source; such as when a tree planted at the birth of a child is made by its flourishing, or otherwise, to indicate the destiny of the child. Unless there was an intelligible being causing the tree to tell the tale of the child's life, no savage, be his mind ever so dull, would be fool enough to take the course of the tree to be any kind of guide. "Omens," says Dr. W. R. Smith, "are not blind tokens; the animals know what they tell to man."[1] The same remark may be extended to trees, stones, etc.

MAGIC AND DIVINATION.

At the first these two were not distinguished; indeed, at the outset divination was not merely a *foretelling* of the future; it was also a *creating* and *controlling* of that future. This early form of divination is really magic applied to future events. The spoken word—blessing or curse—so potent in backward religions, is more than mere divination.

DEMONOLOGY.

The Greek root of the word is no safe guide as to what the word demonology means. What we understand by the term is the belief that there exist evil spirits which are more or less responsible for the misfortunes which assail men. In the earliest stage it is probable that good and evil spirits were not distinguished; but as men got to distinguish characters in one another, as determined by acts, so the spirits soon came to be judged by the good or evil which they were thought to bring about.

Tylor and others will have it that demons are ghosts of deceased men returned to work mischief in the world. This is the way by which Tylor, Herbert Spencer, Dr. Rhys Davids, the learned secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society, and others, explain the origin of animism. A simpler and more likely explanation is Hegel's: "Man objectifies himself, sees himself, reads himself in the striking objects around and above him; he feels his own mental life to be a thing distinct from his bodily life, whence he conceives the two may exist apart." So it is but a short step from the belief in souls, which is much more direct than is commonly imagined, to the belief in spirits that can exist without body, and

[1] *Religion of the Semites*, p. 424.

which, indeed, were never tied to a body. Among no branch of the Semites, so far as I know, are demons looked upon as the ghosts of dead persons come back to worry the living; they are simply evil beings. It is probable that no one key in this matter opens every door; that no one theory accounts for all the facts.

MAGIC AND DEMONOLOGY.

These two have such a close connection[1] that by some they have been almost identified; yet there is a distinction. In magic the agent makes his appeal direct to benevolent spirits, or to a benevolent deity, for protection against demons. The experience of early man soon made him believe in the dualism of spiritual beings; the good he received was traced to benevolent spirits, the bad to malevolent ones.

It is doubtful, and even more than doubtful, whether in the strict sense such a thing as devil worship is to be found. What is so called is most likely worship of the good spirit, or spirits, and supplications or sacrifices to the same for defense against demons. Gods worshiped by one people have been called devils or demons by people who worship other gods. Hebrew words[2] in the Old Testament for heathen deities have been translated in many cases in the Greek version by the Greek form of "demons." In a similar way the demons or jinns of Islam were, for the most part, gods worshiped in the "times of ignorance," *e. g.*, قوزح. The Romans[3] also looked upon the gods of other nations as demons, and as hostile to themselves and to their own gods. Nothing is more striking in the Assyrian religion than the number of prayers which are offered to good deities asking for protection against evil ones.

THE BABYLONIANS AND THE ASSYRIANS.

My authorities here are the works of Lenormant, Tallqvist, *Die Assyrische Beschwörungserie Maqlû*, and King, *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery, being the prayers of the lifting of the hand*, London, 1896. It is now mostly agreed that what Lenormant maintained in his *Chaldean Magic* is true, viz., that the

[1] Sayce's *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 317.

[2] שֵׁדִים; אֱלִילִים, etc.

[3] Dr. Granger's *Worship of the Romans*, p. 174.

magic of the Babylonians and Assyrians was obtained by them from their predecessors, the Accadians. It was, however, reserved for the latter peoples to develop and systematize that which they had received.

Among these two peoples there were two kinds of magicians; first, wizards and witches, who belong to the olden times, who practiced their art in simple ways, having no elaborate ritual and written incantations; secondly, there was the class of recognized magicians, called eššepû or âšipu, the same word as the Hebrew אַשָּׁף and the Syriac ܐܰܫܳܦܳܐ. The first class was supposed to have to do with demons, and to bring evil upon men and women; the others were said to deal immediately with the good deities for the purpose of bringing good upon the state and upon the individuals in it. That is the common distinction made, and there seems support for it in the cuneiform writings; but the real difference is that illegitimate magic was that which was practiced by the common unauthorized people, the other was carried on by the official priest. The case, in fact, is parallel to the condemnation under the influence of the Jerusalem priest of worship at the high places. It was a case of our "craft is in danger," or of an established *versus* unrecognized rivals.

BABYLONIAN AND ASSYRIAN DIVINATION.

The diviner among these people was called bârû (seer, from barû, to see, perceive), his office being called bârûtu, a word which means also the act of deciding from certain signs. The bârû, like the eššepū, belonged to a priestly caste: his special function was prognostication. The omens or signs were of the kind common among Greeks, Romans, and most other peoples; full descriptions of these omens are found on the clay tablets discovered among the ruins of Nineveh. These tablets formed a part of the library of Aššurbanipal, the last of the Assyrian kings. Among these omens may be mentioned the cries and flight of birds, the movements of animals, dreams, and especially the heavenly bodies. Astrology is generally believed to have taken its rise among the Babylonians. However uncertain, or unlikely, this may be, its prevalence in Babylon, from the earliest times, is not to be questioned. Dreams were, next to the heavenly bodies, most frequently consulted. Assyrian kings and generals were

guided in their policies to a large extent by omens. We have an instructive example of this in Ezek., chap. 21, where the king of Babylon, Esarhaddon, takes omens from the fall of arrows, and from the liver of animals offered in sacrifice.

THE HEBREWS.

Although the Hebrews were, on the whole, opposed to the practices considered—at least in the period embraced by the Old Testament (*cf.* Deut. 18:10, 11)[1]—yet there are many survivals to be found in Hebrew literature, and, indeed, not a few cases of actual magic, divination, and demonology. Rabbi David Joel[2] is far too anxious to clear the Bible and other ancient Jewish writings of every trace of these beliefs.

Examples of belief in the efficacy of magical words meet us several times in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; we see it in the "Curse ye me Meroz" of Deborah's song (Jud. 5:23, belonging to the time of the Judges), and in the Balaam incident (Num. 22:5–24, JE.), where the Moabite diviner was made to bless instead of cursing Israel. Goldziher[3] and Brinton[4] and Hillebrandt[5] have all shown the prevalence of the belief in the potency of the uttered word, which, indeed, the former calls a fetish. Among the Arabs, in times of war, the curse pronounced upon the enemy, by the priest or poet, was an element in the conditions of victory as important as the skill and prowess of the warrior.

In the account which Exod., chaps. 7, 8, gives of the plagues brought upon Egypt by the instrumentality of Moses, one and another of the miracles are made by P. to be also performed by the Egyptians' magicians (חַרְטֻמִּים), until the plague of כִּנִּים, or stinging flies, (A. V., lice), is reached. Thus far, however, the reality of the magical power claimed by the Egyptians is acknowledged.

DIVINATION AMONG THE HEBREWS.

Among the ancient Greeks, Romans, Arabs, etc., modes of divination existed which were apparently unknown to the Hebrews

[1] [*Cf.* William Robertson Smith's learned article, "On the Forms of Divination and Magic Enumerated in Deut. 18:10, 11," *Journal of Philology*, Vols. XIII., 273-87; XIV., 113-28.—EDITOR.]

[2] *Der Aberglaube und die Stellung des Judenthums zu demselben*, Breslau, 1881 and 1883.

[3] *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*, I. Theil, Leiden, 1896.

[4] *The Religions of Primitive Peoples*, London, 1897, p. 88 *sqq.*

[5] *Vedische Opfer und Zauber*, 169 *sq.*

in historic times, *e. g.*, by observation of the flights and cries of birds, inspection of the entrails of animals (see, however, regarding this last, Ezek., chap. 21). Compare Dr. Granger's *Worship of the Romans*, pp. 173 *sqq.*, Freytag's *Einleitung in das Studium der arabischen Sprache*, Bonn, 1861, pp. 159 *sqq.*

Yet there are many signs or omens mentioned in the Old Testament which are either similar to or identical with those made use of by other peoples.

1. Belomancy, practiced by Babylonians and Assyrians,[1] by Arabs,[2] and by Romans, is referred to in Hos. 4:12 as well as in the Ezekiel passage, 21:23 *sqq.*, already referred to.

2. The Assyrian king, in the passage just mentioned, besides judging from arrows, judges also from the liver of an animal offered in sacrifice.

3. Sortilege, or divination by lot, common among the Arabs[3] and Romans,[4] is really what is practiced in the "Urim and Thummim," which were simply two stones put into the pocket of the high priest's ephod, with "yes" and "no" written upon them.

4. Although the earliest parts of the Old Testament show no traces of astrology, post-exilic writings, and even the second Isa., 47:13, and Jer. 10:3, show clear traces of the belief in divination by the heavenly bodies. See especially the book of Daniel, which, however, was not written until far on in the second century before our era. There can be no doubt that it was when the Hebrews came into contact with the Babylonians, during their residence in Babylon, that they became acquainted with this method of divination, and, at least to some extent, adopted it. Not only are astrologers regarded with favor in the book of Daniel, but the hero of the book is promoted to be their chief, showing that at the period when the book was written the Jews had no ill-will toward astrology or astrologers. In Matt., chap. 2, the wise men were guided to the event of the birth of Jesus, and also to the place where the birth occurred, by celestial omens, nor is there in the narrative one syllable of condemnation.

5. The most important of all the modes of divination which link the Hebrews with other nations is that by dreams. In fact,

[1] Lenormant, *La Divination*, chaps. 2 and 4; Sayce, *TSBA.*, Vol. III., 145.

[2] Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, p. 132.

[3] Wellhausen, *op. cit.*, 134 *sq.*

[4] Smith, *Dic. of Antiquities*, article "Sortes."

dream divination among the Hebrews differs hardly, if at all from that which obtained among the Greeks and other nations of antiquity.

HEBREW DEMONOLOGY.

There are in the Bible names of demons, such as שֵׁדִים, Deut. 32:17 and Ps. 106:87; שְׂעִירִים, Isa. 13:21; 34:14. This latter word means literally "hairy one," and the beings meant were goat-like demons dwelling in the wilderness. Compare, also, 'Azazēl, Lev. 16:8, 10, 26.[1]

There are also in the Old Testament many safeguards against demon influence; such are the moonlets (שַׁהֲרֹנִים) worn on the necks of women and camels (Jud. 8:21, 26; Isa. 3:18), and originally, at all events, the bells (פַּעֲמֹנִים) at the bottom of the high priest's garment (Exod. 28:33 *sq.*; 39:25). These latter came, however, to answer another purpose, viz., to let the people outside the Jerusalem sanctuary know when the high priest entered the most holy place; Exod. 28:35; *cf.* Ecclus. 45:9 and Luke 9:21.

In the New Testament the belief that disease was due to being indwelt or possessed by demons meets us commonly in the gospels; the healing of diseases believed to be thus due is spoken of as exorcising, or casting out demons. That so many Christians interpret the narratives quite literally shows that the ancient belief in demons still obtains among even advanced races.

POST-BIBLICAL JUDAISM.

In the Talmud and other post-biblical writings, magic, divination, and demonology bulk much more largely than in the biblical canon; it is also noteworthy and significant that, although the Qurān is practically free from these early religious customs, post-Qurān Arabic literature, which is mostly religious, is largely pervaded by them. The Jewish Mishna is comparatively free from these things, but that is largely because it is almost wholly made up of laws and regulations, called Halakhas. The "tetragrammaton"—יהוה—and other names of God, together with names of angels, all of them varied in the most extraordinary ways, were thought to have great efficacy. (See Ginsburg's *Qabbala*, 49 *sq.*). The most important and complete monument of mediæval Jewish magic is the sword of Moses, the text of

[1] Baudissin, *Studien*, I., 36 *sq.*; Wellhausen, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

which, with translation and introduction by Dr. Gaster, was published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* for January, 1896, pp. 149 *sqq*.

Verses of Scripture were recited by Jews in the belief that they were very potent. In Talmud bab. Sanh., 101 *a*, the practice is condemned, and it is said that those guilty of it will lose all part in the future life. In Qohelet Rabba, 10:5, there is an account of the serious illness of a rabbi's son. A Christian pronounces biblical passages over him, whereupon the patient immediately recovers. On hearing this the father is so aggravated because a Christian should have been called in to pronounce the passages that he expresses the wish that his son had died. The work of Joel, already referred to, those of Kohut[1] and of Brecher[2] give a tolerably full description of magic and demonology among the Hebrews from talmudic days to comparatively recent time.

As regards the תְּפִלִּין (or phylacteries), צִיצִת (or tassel), and מְזוּזָה,[3] I hazard the opinion that they were originally charms to keep off demons; it was later Judaism that rationalized them, by making them a means of keeping in mind the laws of God. Menakhot 33*b* and Bereshit Rabba, chap. 35, tell us that the Mĕzūza protects the house against injury. Weber[4] follows Joel in the rationalistic explanation.

SOURCES OF JEWISH MAGIC AND DEMONOLOGY.

On this subject I must be content to refer to my discussion in a treatise on the whole subject of this paper to be published shortly.

THE ARABS.

In tracing the history of religious thought and custom among the Arabs, we have the disadvantage that the literature of this people is comparatively recent; none of it going farther back than, say, a century or two before the appearance of Mohammad. Of pre-Islamic literature not only have we but little preserved, but that little is nearly altogether poetry (*Mo'allaqât*, etc.). Freytag and Wellhausen, in the works already referred to, have

[1] *Jüdische Angelologie und Dämonologie.*

[2] *Die transcendentale Magie und magische Heilarten im Talmud.*

[3] [Fr. Schwally, *ZDMG.*, 52, 136-7, considers מְזוּזָה as identical with Assyrian manzāzu, also written mazzazu and mezazu.—EDITOR.]

[4] *Jüdische Theologie.*

gathered together in their valuable books such notices as they have found in Arabic literature bearing upon the subject under consideration. Freytag's work is not nearly as well known as it ought to be, though it is lacking in that accuracy by which Wellhausen's book is marked. As regards magic, both these writers concern themselves mainly with its demonological side; Wellhausen deals at length with what he calls "Gegenzauber" (countercharm), which he defines as the art of making demons harmless and of scaring them away.

Mohammad's attitude toward such magic as is represented by سِحْر and toward such divination as is implied in the word كَهَانَة is hostile, because they were associated with heathenism; yet da'wa (دَعْوَة), rukya (رُقْيَة), and other forms of incantation were allowed, and indeed were most elaborately arranged for, at least by his immediate followers. Amulets of various kinds (عَوْذَة : عَزِيمَة, etc.) were constantly worn and never condemned.

Islamic writers distinguish between angels (مَلَائِكَة), all of whom are good; satans (شَيَاطِينُ), all of whom are bad, and jinns (جِنّ), some of whom are good and some are bad. Commonly, however, as Wellhausen[1] points out, the jinns took the form of a serpent, and were looked upon as man's foes.

DIVINATION AMONG THE ARABS.

The Arabic soothsayer was both male and female, and received the names kahin (كَاهِن) and kahina (كَاهِنَة). In the case of the former, the offices of priest and soothsayer were joined. Another name by which the soothsayer was known was ḥāzin (حَازِ), which was varied by ḥazzāun (حَزَّاء).

There were certain signs which were interpreted as foretelling good or evil. The approach of a raven was an intimation that

[1] Wellhausen, *op. cit.*, pp. 152 *sqq.*

friends were to be separated; hence the proverb أَشْأَمُ مِنْ غُرَابِ ٱلْبَيْنِ "unluckier than the raven of separation." The bird called أَخْيَلُ (the green wood-pecker probably) was also looked upon as presaging evil.

These Arab soothsayers took omens from the flight of birds; from the human body, especially from the face; from the lines on the hands (palmistry), and by watching the descent of balls which had been thrown in the air. For technical words and expressions see Freytag, *op. cit.*, pp. 158 *sq.*

The countercharms (Gegenzauber) were of the usual kind—incantations, physical agents, and amulets.